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DEAN JOHN O. MUDD

W. Bjarne Johnson*

In his tenure as dean of the University of Montana School of Law, Jack Mudd brought something unique to the school and to legal education in general: Vision.

It does not seem so revolutionary to recognize that legal theory ultimately must be put into practice. Both law students and society as a whole are better served if learning to do so is done in the law school context, rather than at the expense of individual clients. Nine years ago, though, this idea was viewed as a highly questionable departure from the comfortable rut legal education had plowed since the 19th century.

What Jack has managed to do, then, is to take a subject that was not even discussed in polite academic circles, curricular reform, and implement it in the face of a state legislature that apparently believes education in general should suffer death by slow financial strangulation, and that the law school, in particular, should bear a teaching burden three to four times greater than any other graduate program in Montana. The legislature remains unaware of, or worse, unrepentant over, the consequences of its actions. The law school has never looked back.

The job has been enormous. Making these changes required a complete overhaul of the law school curriculum in an effort to integrate the teaching of theory with the practical application of that theory at each step of the way. Making these changes alone would have been difficult enough. Making them in light of the law school's meager resources is particularly impressive. Even though the law school is state funded and the state of Montana is the most direct beneficiary of the program (90% of all graduates remain and practice in Montana), these changes all have been made without legislative funding.

This program at the law school is not yet perfect. Jack knows that. What he finds more important is that the process has been started, and that the law school is blessed with a competent and creative faculty capable of continuing the efforts they have all made so far. These efforts appear to be working. The law school is now becoming recognized nationally as a leader in this area.

While it was the academic program and the possibility of change that first attracted him to the dean's position, Jack has

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never had the luxury of devoting his efforts solely to academic betterment. Simple academic survival has too often been the more pressing need. Much of what is required to accomplish that survival seemingly is not immediately apparent.

Being dean of the law school is in large measure dealing with a wide variety of often fractious constituencies. Each group, whether it be students, faculty, alumni, donors or the legislature, tends to view the law school and its performance with the understandable myopia of that group's own perspective and concerns. All of these concerns no doubt have some validity, but they are rarely in complete harmony. Through it all, though, Jack has treated everyone with unfailing good humor and civility.

Being dean of the law school is also fund raising. Much of what is now taken for granted as part of a law school education, such as paid research assistantships, travel expense assistance, and computer time, simply would not exist but for Jack's personal ability to attract and retain ongoing private funding.

Montana and the law school have been fortunate to have one so capable as Jack Mudd serving as Dean for the last nine years. The challenge now will be to find someone with comparable skills, drive, and understanding to carry on the changes he has begun.